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## ***CAREX PRAIREA*** **PRAIRIE SEDGE**

Prairie Sedge is a grass-like perennial with stems 50-100 cm tall that form clumps and arise from a short, black rootstock. Stems are sharply triangular in cross section. The lowest leaves are reduced to sheaths with short scales, and the upper leaves have well-developed flat leaf blades that are 2-3 mm wide and 10-30 cm long. The leaf sheaths are red dotted and strongly copper-tinged near the mouth. Bisexual spikes with the male flowers above are borne in somewhat open, often drooping heads that are 3-8 cm long. The scales that cover the perigynia are light reddish brown with translucent margins. The perigynia are 2.5-3.5 mm long and 1.2-1.5 mm wide, straw or brown colored, few nerved (most evident on the back), and taper to a long serrulate beak. Each perigynium has two reddish-brown stigmas that protrude from the opening at the top, and an achene that is lens-shaped. Fruiting mid-July through August.

*CAREX PRAIREA* is somewhat intermediate between *C. DIANDRA* and *C. CUSICKII*; distinguished from the former by having leaf sheaths that are copper colored inside at the mouth, more open flowering heads, and dull perigynia. *C. CUSICKII* also has copper colored sheaths and open heads but has wider leaves and brownish-black perigynia. A hand lens or microscope and technical key are needed for positive identification.